

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SAIGON 00861 200149Z

61

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 NSCE-00 IO-14

DPW-01 ACDA-19 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 AID-20

DRC-01 /132 W

----- 027928

O R 191510Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0938 IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

AMCONSUL CAN THO

CINCPAC

AMCONSUL DANANG

AMCONSUL NHA TRANG

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

USDEL JEC PARIS

AMMBASSY VIENTIANE 2163

UNCLAS SAIGON 0861

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PRECEDENCE RAISED TO IMMEDIATE

PER SVC REQUEST FROM ORIGIN/DRAFTER)

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652 N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, VS

SUBJECT: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PASSES CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS
AND CONTROVERSY

REF: (A) SAIGON 0609

(B) SAIGON 0688 (NOTAL)

(C) SAIGON 0691 (NOTAL)

(D) SAIGON 0759

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PAGE 02 SAIGON 00861 200149Z

1. MOVING SWIFTLY, THE PRO-ADMINISTRATION LEADERSHIP OF THE NATIONAL

ASSEMBLY CONVENED A JOINT SESSION JANUARY 19 TO CONSIDER THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS INTRODUCED FOUR DAYS EARLIER. THE SESSION LASTED ABOUT SEVEN HOURS, AND THE AMENDMENTS PASSED WITHOUT CHANGE. THE KEY VOTE PRODUCED 152 LEGISLATORS FOR THE ADMINISTRATION POSITION. THE MINIMUM NEEDED FOR PASSAGE WAS 146, TWO-THIRDS OF THE ASSEMBLY.)

THE DEBATE AND VOTES

2. WHEN THE SESSION STARTED AT 0900 HOURS, THE OPPOSITION ENTERED THE CHAMBER CARRYING SIGNS PROTESTING THE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS, BUT THIS GESTURE WAS SHORT-LIVED. BOTH OPPOSITION AND PRO-GOVERNMENT DEPUTIES SPOKE TO THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES DURING THE DEBATE. THE PRO-GOVERNMENT ARGUED CHIEFLY BY THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE UNDER PHAM NHU PHIEN SET UP TO REPORT ON THE PROPOSALS, WAS THAT NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT MUST BE GIVEN PRECEDENCE. THE TIME NEEDED TO ACCOMPLISH PROGRAMS OF THIS SORT, THE

COMMITTEE BELIEVED IS FROM FIVE TO FIFTEEN YEARS. THE OPPOSITION FELT THAT PRESIDENT THIEU HAD DONE NOTHING TO JUSTIFY HIS CONTINUING IN OFFICE, MUCH LESS AN EXTENSION OF HIS TERM. FURTHER, THEY FELT THAT THE AMENDMENTS WERE BEING RUSHED THROUGH WITHOUT SUFFICIENT EXAMINATION. THE OPPOSITION ARGUED PARTICULARLY THAT THE AMENDMENTS WERE BEING PUSHED THROUGH JUST BEFORE TET WHEN ALL THE NEWSPAPERS WOULD BE CLOSED FOR THE HOLIDAYS, LESSENING CHANCES FOR PUBLIC DEBATE ON THE ISSUES.

3. DURING THE DEBATE SENATOR NGUYEN VAN HUYEN, FORMER CHAIRMAN OF THE UPPER HOUSE, SAID HE WOULD DISOLVE HIS TU DO PARTY IN PROTEST IF THE MEASURES PASSED. A HOA HAO DEPUTY OF THE NATIONALIST GROUP, VU CONG MINH, SHAVED HIS HEAD IN THE CHAMBER AS A PROTEST GESTURE DURING THE DEBATE.

4. AT 1529 HRS, DEPUTY TRAN THANG THUC THE LEADER OF THE PRO-ADMINISTRATION INDEPENDENCE BLOC IN THE LOWER HOUSE, CALLED THE QUESTION AND ASKED FOR A RAISED-HAND VOTE ON THIS MOTION. A RAPID RAISED-HAND VOTE WAS TAKEN AND AN AFFIRMATIVE VOTE OF 152 WAS ANNOUNCED.

5. AS THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS HAD BEEN REPORTED OUT OF UNCLASSIFIED

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PAGE 03 SAIGON 00861 200149Z

COMMITTEE AS ONE BILL, WITH THE THREE AMENDMENTS IN ONE ARTICLE AND THE TRANSITIONAL MEASURE IN ANOTHER, THE NEXT VOTE WAS TAKEN ON WHETHER TO ADOPT THE FIRST ARTICLE, I.E. ALL THREE AMENDMENTS AS REPORTED. THE AMENDMENTS WERE CARRIED BY A RAISED-HAND VOTE OF 152 IN FAVOR.

6. AT THIS POINT THE OPPOSITION OBJECTED, ASKING FOR A ROLL CALL VOTE. A RAISED-HAND VOTE WAS HELD ON THIS MOTION, WITH ONLY 38

IN FAVOR.

7. FOLLOWING THE FAILURE OF THIS OPPOSITION MOVE, A VOTE -(BY RAISED-HANDS-) WAS TAKEN ON THE TRANSITION ARTICLE. 155 IN FAVOR WAS THE ANNOUNCED RESULT. FINALLY, A VOTE ON THE ENTIRE REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE WAS MADE BY RAISED HANDS, AND THE ENTIRE REPORT WAS ADOPTED BY AN ANNOUNCED VOTE OF 153. (NEGATIVE VOTES WERE NOT REQUESTED BY THE CHAIR DURING THE BALLOTING.) ABOUT TEN MINUTES HAD PASSED SINCE THE MOTION TO CLOSE THE DEBATE.

POST-SESSION MOVES BY THE OPPOSITION.

8. AFTER THE JOINT SESSION ADJOURNED AT 1540 HOURS, A GROUP OF OPPOSITION LEGISLATORS HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE STEPS OF THE UPPER HOUSE. THERE THREE MORE LEGISLATORS SHAVED THEIR HEADS IN PROTEST. OPPOSITION SENATOR VU VAN MAU (WHO IN 1963 PROTESTED AGAINST THE REGIME OF THEN PRESIDENT DIEM IN THE SAME MANNER), OPPOSITION SENATOR TON-AI LIENG (A CHAM), AND OPPOSITION DEPUTY TRAN VAN THUNG (FROM KHANH HOA).

9. ALSO AT THIS IMPROMPTU PRESS CONFERENCE, SENATOR NGUYEN VAN HUYEN ANNOUNCED THAT HE WOULD RESIGN FROM THE UPPER HOUSE.

10. AFTER THE PRESS CONFERENCE APPROXIMATELY THIRTY OF THE OPPOSITION LEGISLATOR WALKEDDOWN THE MIDDLE OF CONG LY AND LE LOI STREETS TO THE LOWER HOUSE, CARRYING SIGNS PROTESTING THE PASSAGE OF THE AMENDMENTS AND OTHER ISSUES. THE MARCH WAS WITHOUT INCIDENT AND THE LEGISLATORS DISPERSED PEACEABLY AFTER REACHING THE LOWER HOUSE. POLICE MADE NO MOVE TO PREVENT THE MARCH.
MARTIN

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